DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 725 FL 003 983

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Paquette, F. Andre |
| TITLE | A Paper Tiger in an Academic Jungle. |
| PUB DATE | 29 Dec 72 |
| NOTE | 10p.; Paper presented at the joint forum of the Association of Departments of English and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, New York, N.Y., December 29, 1972 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29 |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Curriculum Development; *Language Instruction; *Modern Languages; National Programs; *Program Evaluation; *Program Improvement; School Surveys; Summative Evaluation |

ABSTRACT

This survey of profession-wide accomplishments and failures in foreign language instruction, characteristic of the last two decades, is complemented by suggestions intended to spur teachers and educational institutions into initiating improvements in curriculum development considered to be vital to the survival of the foreign language profession. Specific references to programs and publications, characteristic of the period under consideration, are outlined in four categories: (1) professional statements, (2) professional programs with specific objectives, (3) selected publications, and (4) new means for professional communiction. Concluding remarks predict that unless the language teaching profession recovers the "boldness" of the early 1950's the profession shall be nothing more than a "paper tiger" in an academic jungle. (RL)

ED 073725

# A PAPER TIGER IN AN ACADEMIC JUNGLE

Twenty years ago the foreign-language teaching profession in this country stood at the threshold of a major academic reform movement--perhaps the most comprehensive reform ever initiated in the history of the discipline in the United States. William Riley Parker opened the door to the reform in 1952 when he announced the creation of the MLA Foreign Language Program, for two purposes:

1. "to understand a critical situation well enough to know how to correct it, and
2. "to start correcting it."

Earlier in this ADFL session, Richard Thompson discussed, in a general way, the past twenty years and the future for the foreign-language profession. I should like to look at the past and the future from the specific point of view of curriculum change--because our ultimate objective must be to improve our curricula and the quality of our instruction.

Today, in different ways, many of us are asking what the long-range effects of our recent reform movement have been. Our professional journals and newsletters are deluged with articles which ask: Why are enrollments falling? Why are requirements being dropped? What's gone wrong? Where did we go wrong? When? How? And in the shadow of each of these questions is the key one: Where is our national leadership?

FL003 983

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

(Let me reassure you; I am not going to engage in more self-flagellation. We've already had too much of that in recent months; moreover, it tends not to be productive.)

Instead, I would like to take a brief look at a few specific activities of the recent past and attempt to suggest where and how we were successful or failed, so that we may more carefully plan for the future. I have grouped these specifics into four categories:

1. Professional Statements
2. Professional Programs with specific objectives
3. Selected Publications
4. New Means of Professional Communication

1. Professional Statements of the Past Twenty Years:

   A. Foreign-Language Program Policy Statements

      1. Values of Foreign-Language Study
      2. On Foreign-Language Study
      3. Foreign Languages and International Understanding
      4. The Problem of Time
      5. Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES - 2 statements)
      6. Qualifications of Secondary School Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages

   B. Statement of Recommendations of the MLA prepared by the Conference on Criteria for a College Textbook in Beginning Spanish

   C. MLA Statement on the Training of the New College Instructor

   D. The Conference Report (MacCallister Report) on the Preparation of College Teachers of Modern Foreign Language

E. MLA Statement on the Preparation of Teachers of FLES
F. Guidelines for Teacher-Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages

2. Selected Professional Programs of the past twenty years with specific objectives:

A. The Carnegie-supported national consultant service
B. The State Foreign-Language Consultant Program: Title III, NDEA of 1958
C. The NDEA Institute Program
D. The Center for Applied Linguistics
E. The MLA Materials Center
F. The MLA Foreign-Language Testing Program

3. Selected Publications of the Past Twenty Years:

A. Guides to the Teaching of French, German, and Spanish in the Elementary School
B. Selective Lists of Materials (SLOM)
C. A Film Series on the Principles and Methods of Teaching A Second Language
D. Several hundred statistical reports and surveys
E. Modern Spanish
F. Modern Portuguese
G. William Moulton's Linguistic Guide to Language Learning
H. The AATSP Culture Packets

4. New Means of Professional Communication begun in the Past Twenty Years:

A. Regional Conferences:
   1. Pacific Northwest Conference
   2. Northeast Conference
   3. Southern Conference on Language Teaching
   4. Central States Conference on Language Teaching
   (Each with some form of publication and a meeting)

B. Revised and New State Foreign-Language Newsletters

C. New special-interest foreign-language associations:
   1. NCSSFL
   2. NALLD
   3. ACTFL
   4. ADFL
   5. Several new specific language groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, TESOL, the Portuguese Language Development Group--each with one or more publications.

D. New publications from old associations: for example, Die Unterrichtspraxis, the AATG Newsletter, and the MLA Newsletter.

E. New and revised state foreign-language organizations

F. New relationships between the MLA and its regional affiliates. Also, a new Northeast MLA.

G. New international affiliations

(Before I go on, let me remind you that these statements, programs, publications, and other activities constitute only a minimal list; they probably represent less than five per cent of the "professional activities" of the last two decades. If you doubt my estimate, I suggest that you scan just one section of the ACTFL Annual Bibliography, or its predecessor by Professor Nostrand, or its companion bibliographies in linguistics and literature.)

Where have we been most successful?

First, I believe that we have brought about curricular change most effectively through the publication of specific instructional materials such as the FLES Guides, the films on second-language teaching, the Selective Lists of Materials, Modern Spanish, Modern Portuguese, Moulton's Linguistic Guide to Language Learning and the Culture Packets produced by the AATSP. The reason for the success

is simple: these are materials which can be placed directly into the hands of students and teachers at the appropriate levels--including trainers of teachers.

Second, we have succeeded in bringing special human talent to teachers and school department heads through our work with national consultant services (Carnegie-supported) and the state Foreign-Language Consultants--originally supported under NDEA.

What is unfortunate is that we have done so little in both areas. Moreover, in the teaching of foreign languages in the elementary schools, there has been virtually no sustained, comprehensive professional leadership at the national level since the initial policy statements were issued, early in 1955.

Where have we had limited success?

A critical development of the past two decades was the creation of the Center for Applied Linguistics; and although we cannot expect the Center to supply all that language teachers need from this discipline, it does seem that the Center could be more active in translating research findings into practical materials, guides, etc., for use in classroom instruction and teacher-training programs.

Similarly, the MLA has conducted many statistical studies and surveys, but the results have rarely been accompanied or followed by comprehensive interpretation which would help specialists and non-specialists to understand the implications of the studies at the national, regional, or local level. And in assessing the results of research and studies by others, our national leadership has provided only an occasional evaluation of highly controversial studies--leaving the individual classroom teacher to be assailed by doubting colleagues and anxious administrators.

Paradoxically, at the same time that we were having limited success in translating linguistic theory into new teaching strategies and techniques, and while statistics and surveys were being published with little or no interpretation, we were engaged in an unprecedented expansion of our professional "network" of organizations, publications, and meetings. Linguistic jokes were generously spread through our newsletters and journals, persons previously engaged in consultation at the local level began touring the meeting circuit. At the same time, our publications reprinted the uninterpreted statements, statistics, and surveys at a rate exceeded only by the capacity of a Xerox 3600. Our annual meetings became a show place for the peddlers of the new hardware and the old software. And we advertised--the same equipment and materials in our publications without discrimination--and in direct contradiction of what we stated professionally in the MLA Selective Lists of Materials.

In short, the professional tools which should have become the sustaining sources of information about new developments and new directions too frequently fell into the hands of George--who was described quite well by William Riley Parker in his, "The Profession of George." And many of these tools still remain in George's hands; in fact, we have added new Georges such as those who promote travel and study abroad with total disregard for the criteria our profession has developed.

Where have we been least successful?

In the preparation of elementary, secondary, and college and university teachers! When we consider the professional statements, the summer institutes, the MLA Foreign-Language Testing Program, the Carnegie-supported teacher-training study which led to the Guidelines for Teacher-Education Program in MFLS; all of these and many related activities, we must conclude that we have failed--in a comprehensive way--to adequately prepare future members of the profession. Three examples will suffice:

Although they were not designed to do so, the institutes had little effect on the regular offerings of most institutions.

The MLA Proficiency Tests were used by a handful of institutions--even those who were involved in the development of the tests, could not--or would not--convince their own institutions to use them even though institutions have taken on more and more direct responsibility for certifying the total preparation of school teachers.

During my last four years at MLA Headquarters, several activities took me to individual classrooms on about 100 campuses; frequently, these were the institutions of "leaders" in the profession--(those who had served, or were serving, on major national and regional committees). The gap between theory and practice, between public, professional posture and individual institutional implementation, between abstract expectations and classroom reality, was as wide and depressing as the conditions described by Parker at the beginning of the Foreign-Language Program.

Surely we realize that, just as the "National Interest and Foreign Languages," and the foreign-language interests of individuals in the nation do not coincide; we cannot assume that the individual foreign-language teacher's convictions and public statements coincide with the convictions and practices of those individuals and committees with whom that same teacher must work in his home institution. Our failure to significantly affect the preparation of future members of the profession, or to significantly improve the competence of those already in it, makes it amply clear that in its most vital aspect, our reform movement has been nothing more than a paper tiger.

We have only scratched the surface in our attempt to analyze the forces of resistance to curricular change in American Higher Education. We have neither identified nor supported (I mean through national leadership and money)--those individuals and institutions which have demonstrated a capacity and willingness for long-range change in their programs. For example, there is substantial evidence that our usual approach to beginning and intermediate foreign-language instruction is inefficient and ineffective. Our response in most cases has been to ask for two or three more hours a week; it is an inadequate request and a token response.

We are afraid to make vigorous demands for advanced language proficiency before accepting students into advanced courses in literature and civilization--and more particularly--into professional preparation

programs. Now is when we should be requiring "superior" competence, but we are not. During this MLA meeting, I have spoken with two chairmen who interviewed twenty candidates for two different positions; and their most consistent observation was that of inadequate language proficiency.

How can we alter these conditions? I believe that we must rediscover the boldness which characterized the early days of the MLA Foreign Language Program:

Is there really anything wrong with national curricula for elementary school foreign-language instruction? (Consider the millions of children who move from school to school.)

Why can't we have relevant, high quality doctoral programs for colleagues who cannot study full time for several years?

Why can't we (censure) poor programs of study abroad for high school and college students?

Why don't we propose that beginning and intermediate foreign-language instruction be offered exclusively--in "total immersion" programs? (After watching the Middlebury Chinese and Japanese Schools for three summers, I am convinced that we should offer similar programs in the commonly-taught languages--and we at Middlebury will begin doing so next summer.)

Why can't our professional associations work in specific ways with selected institutions as they have with selected authors in producing Modern Spanish and other instructional materials?

What I am suggesting is, that unless we recover the boldness of the early fifties, we will be nothing more than a "paper tiger" in an academic jungle.

F. André Paquette
MLA ADE-ADFL Joint Forum